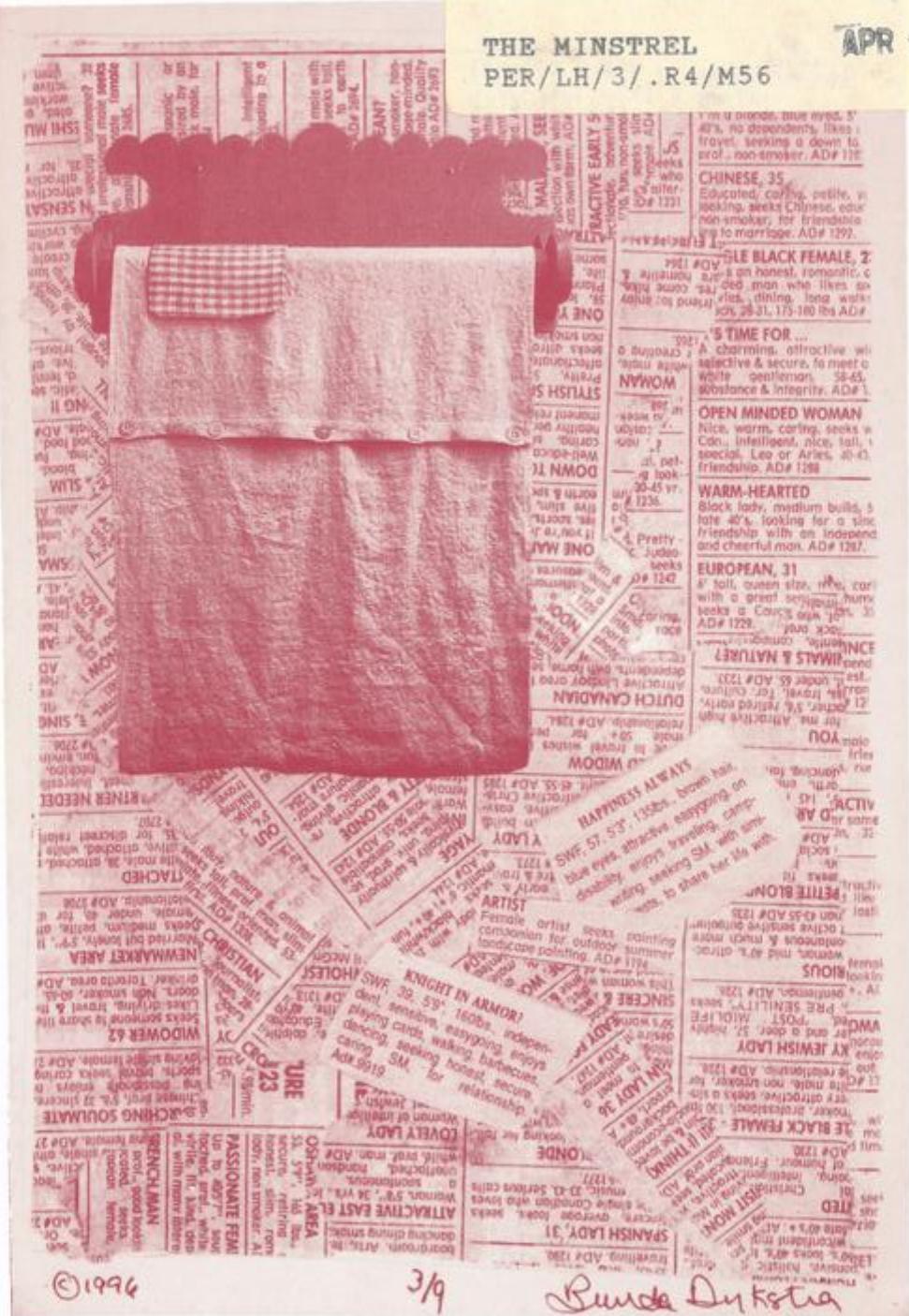


The Minstrel

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Redeemer College's Poetry and Fiction Magazine
volume 7, spring 1997

The Minstrel

Redeemer College's Poetry and Fiction Magazine

Volume 7, Spring 1997

"Ring out the want, the care, the sin,
The faithless coldness of the times;
Ring out, right out my mournful rhymes,
But ring the fuller minstrel in."

Tennyson

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The Minstrel is published annually through funding by the Re-deemer College Student Senate. It is written, edited and designed by students. Anyone who wishes to comment on *The Minstrel*, please speak to David Lehr or Stephanie Cilia. Anyone who is interested in the position of Assistant Editor for 1998, please speak to Stephanie Cilia.

Cover Art: *I Wash My Hands Of It*, by Brenda Dykstra

The Morning

There is a cathedral sacredness
in dawn's sacrament, an orchestration
in the open stillness,
yet a symphony of silence.
In the vibrant murkiness
the shadowy willows,
arrayed in silken livery,
attend night's benedict.
While scattering their blushing leaf,
the garlands usher in
the white bride ghost of morning
who, with veil of milky teardrop,
haunts the earthen aisle.
from airy rostrum,
the pulsating orb of cardinal fire
proclaims the benediction.
The dusken embrace of dawn
lifts the veil of mist
to celebrate the ceremonious
marriage of the morning.

Marcia Elgersma

The Sunday of Orthodoxy

Old black coat
Woolen and worn with a stench
Of garlic over garlic.
The wooden pew recognises
Every crevice of your shape
As it knows its own
Cracked and coated veneer.
You have been here
In the light and darkness.

Old black hat
Rises out of dense clouds
Of sweet incense
And smoking candle.
The lights of those before you
Cast shadows of colour
And shine
With modest brilliance
Upon your simple head.





Old dark face
Lifted humble high
Into the heavy air,
Your eyes wet with baptism
That pour from the icons
Who tell the story;
This steadfast story
That has kept you here
A disciple, a follower,
Brother, father,
Lover
Has led me here,
A stranger
Who has known you forever.

—Jane Hogeterp

Untitled

The peonies shake their pompons
thankng the wind for the chance
to dance. While I lounge in
the hammock, I admire those brave
and cheerful peonies, their scarlet
vivacity, their crimson glory,
how they nod and laugh in the breeze.
There they grow int he middle of the emerald
lawn, so brave and bold and brazen.

Somewhere above me Sammy Bluejay
squawks unpleasantly and I peer
up among the pine needles
of the two trees which carry my hammock
like the two unlucky girls at recess
assigned to the skipping rope ends.
Yes, there's old Sammy, blue and loud as ever.

The association between summer
and childhood is strong; hair
flying in the wind, exploring
corners in the yard, searching
for treasures along the fence lines,
the smell of clover and trefoil
blown across the fields, hide and seek
among the hay stooks, the red painted
swing set, the swimming pool,
my brother and I being Superman--

holding our towels high and running
around the house, racing our bikes
around the manure pile at milking time--
him as Rosco and me as Bo or
Luke Duke, our rock collections are
the end of the lane, dragging
our heavy and stiff cat off the road,
desperately trying to understand,
and not to cry.

Among the sounds of crickets, the drone
of a bee and a distant haybine,
the song of a single robin is somewhere
close by; it starts and stops and starts
again. I feel no need to open
my eyes or find it; it sounds like
the echo of the child's voice,
a sure thing, a lasting thing.

—Tracey Buys

to old friends and editors

disillusioned me
I wander
wonder
in a hopeless wood
you watch
above the blackened trees
in a purple sky
from a mighty zeppelin

a damned doctor
killed my child
with the knife
of circumcision

disillusioned me
the wind is fire
burns my face away
I'm finally naked
and
I see you look at me
through icy pools
a million miles away

—Kai Groen





Through my Eyes

We lie here making snow angels
in the dark night;
above, we see stars faintly,
behind the clouds.

Some would find meaning
in simple observation,
but I am less a poet
than a dreamer with a pen.

—*Jeannette Sandink*

untitled

The seven o'clock
light
slants
like Emily Dickinson's truth
between the houserows
making everything
oddly beautiful.

It's strange, light at eye-level
as though all is darkness
above my head.
Even the bugs cast shadows.

And the grass
on the side of the highway
filters the light like
beer
through
charcoal

leaving the ditch
golden full
of
whiskey.

—*Andrea VanderKooij*

Exp./ 96 NOV 01

The day he said he loved me
I cried; bud passion bloomed
softly, scarlet like the peonies
I grew under the kitchen window,
and though I never knew when
the flowers died, I watched his
love for me turn rancid--a
stench like forgotten butter
in a fridge of chilled memories,
where he must have kept what
poisoned me. When I expired
he cleaned it out--replaced
the old with new stock--fresh
products give him pleasure;
I watch him savour them like
a wine-taster who swirls the
liquid in his mouth then spits,
already grasping a new glass.
If he could feel me now,
it would be my icy fingers
wrapped around his kissed
neck, and after I revelled
in his humiliating, undignified demise,
I would unplug his fridge and
put him in it to rot, marked forever
on his sallow forehead with
an expiry date from months before.

—Stephanie Cilia

Room in the Attic

Shafts of sunlight filter through faded folds of lace.
Reflected particles of dust swirl through the air.
Dust lies thick on the wooden window frame;
It blankets the floor, revealing the footsteps of all who have
Entered.

—Caroline Kraft





mem

I caught you floating away
with my memory
flitting around on some hill
I gave you a piece to chew on
you bit off more
said you could handle it
but it was my memory
and it exploded in your mind
soon you realised that you
could not really be a part of
every little bit
I sort of bit my lip
and made a mental note not to let you
sample as much the next time

—Tim Lyon

Aquarium

You swim inside your glass bubble;
I look at you with a magnified eye
and study your skin that looks like
a slippery golden slide, like the one
I used to play on in my youth.
I remember the day I found you;
you had stolen away from your school
to explore your large green world
with those innocent eyes.
But I, scooping you into my mesh ladle,
out of your swampy-souped dwelling,
gave you a new place--
a windowed palace carpeted in crystal,
ornamented with sparkling gems--
a ballroom to dart and dance among
exotic plants, to parade your
coat of gold, swishing your royal fans.

You press your nose against the pane,
staring at me blankly, sadly
through pupils now dried up like mud
splotched on misty glass,
methodically mouthing the word
you have been for years:
Home...Home...Home....

—Julia Dam

University Poem

Yet such is the bitter specimen of the fruit of that ambitious system which has of late years been making way among us; for its result on ordinary minds, and on the common rule of students, is less satisfactory still; they leave their place of education simply dissipated and relaxed by the multiplicity of subjects, which they have never really mastered, and so shallow as not even to know their shallowness.

-John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 1852.

so
now
that
you
know
 everything
that
there
 is
to
know
where
 are
you
going
to
go
?
and
what
 are
you
going
to
do
?
with
it
?

—Alan Groombridge





2 am.

Icy raindrops continue falling rhythmically,
Dark clouds engulf the sky,
Layers of snow melt slowly
Strong winds blow by, whistling with ease.

My body shivers as the frigid air fills my lungs,
The smell of melting snow tells me of spring's soon arrival,
Lights in windows come on all around,
A flowing stream of water fills the cracks of
The sidewalk and races to the ditch.

Despite the cold, I begin to grow tired,
It's time to leave this closing winter carnival,
I crawl back in bed with a sense of relief,
And fall asleep to the lullaby of rain.

—Sara Weber

Irish Cream Coffee

There it is
The YMCA
I've been here just
a little while
cased it twice
so far

The blue posters on white
walls laugh and jeer
Once I step in I
become a statistic
a bum

I am pushed in by those
in my life
but repulsed by my mind
Only the
destitute go there

I take another sip of
Irish cream coffee
Look around and listen
to the bustle of the Food Court

I must go in, to
face the truth
I have been judged
Unemployed
the people lock
me up into mental
isolation

Before I go
Another cup of
Irish cream coffee

—*Caleb deBoer*

Porcelain

A tiny hand,
curled in sleep,
such a grip on my heart.
Every twitch
of the porcelain mouth
tugs at my heart.
He speaks not a word
but his eyes tell
tales beyond his years.
Wisdom in those eyes,
eyes that can see
deep into the depths of my soul.
For this tiny one,
I would give my very life.
Through so much,
his brief life
only beginning.
This innocence,
simple love,
controls me in a way,
a way no other can.
For him, anything--
all for him.
I'll do what he asks.
Manipulation
in a porcelain smile.

—*Kathleen Jarvis*





Unshed Wisdom

Picnic table,
smooth and comfortable
resting under the great oak
Oh tree of wisdom, of deliverance
Why do you not speak?

Laughing voices
ascend to the silver stars
they speak, they remember
the drudging daily routine of life,
as a singed log to a raging fire.

Picnic table,
harsh and scuffed
ignores the whispered song
of the towering tree,
Oh mind of ignorance, of harm
Why do you not learn?

Hushed nerves
thrive on the melted wood,
yearning to forget
the reason of such stillness,
of thirsty forgetfulness.

Picnic table,
harsh and scuffed,
With the shell of unshed blood.

—Cheryl Hoftyzer

The Gift Shop

is usually my favourite
part
of the
Art Museum

(I feel
kind of
bad
about that
sometimes)

—Andrea VanderKooij

Untitled

Of course then you never recognised the details for what they were. Like the time Mom and Dad bought Betsy, the jersey cow, from the Jobseys. Jim and Henny Jobsey had left Betsy with her calf until both bovines were practically the same size. So when Betsy came to live on the farm, she spent the first two weeks bawling. What did you know about the dark rivers of hair beneath the eyes?

You were puzzled by your cousin's crying in the graveyard. From the back of the car you asked why the monthly visits to Beppe had ended.

I must admit, when the pain and terror were yours, you never had any trouble expressing sorrow. Somewhere hidden in the depths of your heart was a great tap that was far too easy to turn on. And with all the tears came a terrible wailing for which you were christened "the fire engine" by the extended family.

Of course now the wailing has ended.

Eventually you notice a lack of emotion. No, not a lack of emotion but an awkwardness. Like the time you told Mom over the phone you loved her and her response was: "Pardon?"

In a dream you were cut by the *kaas schaaf*, a big, ugly, red gouge across the cheek. Mom didn't even care. In a preoccupied oblivion she ignored your pain.

You suspected it was the adolescent thing. "It's natural for teens to confide in their friends."

You suspected it was the Dutch immigrant background pushing aside emotions and persevering. "If you can't eat it you won't need it."

But now Oma had died and you have new suspicions. Mom had been acting more and more like Opa. Dad says things will be different for Mom when Opa eventually dies. And while you listen to the details, the stories, the stories you have heard before, you wonder if Mom ever cries like Betsy.

—Gwenda Hiemstra

Receiving Everything

Conflict,
Tossing To and Fro.
Stability,
Fleeting Like a Shadow.

Confusion,
Thundering Inside.
Fear,
Coiling Tight.

Hunting
For A Steadfast
Place
Receiving
Everything in His
Amazing Grace.

—corina i. maclean





I've Been Following My Cat Shadow*

Perched in the rafters
Of hand-hewn logs
Shaped with iron claws,
Shadow sits regally
Watching all below.

She glides down to
The couch then onto the
Floor only pausing to
Look at me acknowledging
The game is on.

I scamper after her
As she hobbles over
The cold granite floor,
Her crippled leg striving
To keep the pace.

Up the steep stairs
She flies as I
Trail behind on
All fours hoping
To catch her before

She goes under the
Bed making my arm
A log she can shape
With her claws as
I reach to tag her.

*title inspired by Cat Stevens

—Mike Kleinhuis

Mind Games

Drink it in, then quickly turn away
every time, never give
mustn't shatter the illusion
Push and Pull.
I want you--go away
I need you--who me?
As if.
I need someone--single life's the best
Let's talk--never be honest though

More games, then one falters,
quickly recover, in time for
the other to break down the guard.
The rules are bent, broken for a few months
then reinstated
Now it's not a game
I think it's real--at least for you.
It's becoming real for me.
I just haven't figured out who made that change
you, me, or him?

—Joni Westerink

Eh?

And why do you call me
At this strange hour
Anyway
As if you have
Anything left to say
Already you have said too much
And jumped the gun
Anticipating my stop
“Alright this is where I get off,” I yell

After several more calls
Any sensible person would have done the same
Altering my hairdo was too far
Anything to avoid you I vowed
Advancing from the other direction
Adroitly approaching you head bowed
Assuming an attitude of apprehension
Aggressively I fail to mention
Army boots are not my favourite style
And perhaps it is better if I don't see you
At least for a while

Aaaaugh come hither my love one last smile
Anger is not becoming my precious child
Escape escape for a while
And come back when the weather is mild

—Tim Lyon





...But Not

It begins
Innocent and naive;
Solitude, but not
Isolated, however, free.
Thoughts remembered, figures stored
Images interact and you listen;
Mimicking is no longer
You are your own, but not

Instinct
Impulse
Repeat
Discover
Interact
Conscious

Short lived freedom, long remembered.
Life with others;
Others are life, but not
Given life
Discover life
Experience life
Love life
It leaves
Suddenly, it all ends

But not
Isolated, solitude
But not
Alone
It ends, it is finished,
But not

—Dan Koopman

Immunization

sometimes we're so pedantic
and so stiff and afraid

maybe it's just me but
please don't be immune to me

have I changed or
do I just act different

have you changed or
was it just a passing phase

I don't know why i feel
this way, then that

but I fear myself and
where my mind takes me

my eyes hurt from looking
at you, and I ache

my internal being hurts
from you looking at me

and you're not asking
the right questions

and my feeling hurt
from not seeing you

I want to create a gap
because you seem so
immune to me.

—*Rachel VanArragon*

Emptiness

Like my mailbox
The T.V when it's off
A violin without strings
A sock with no foot
A mug with no tea
The sky with no sun
The night with no moon
A rose with no petals
A clock with no hands
A classroom with no one to be taught
A frame with no picture
Eyes with no life
A mouth with no teeth
A calendar with no days
A sun-drenched strawberry with no taste.

—*Amanda Wilms*





The Gentleman of Venice

The sea spits brine
to smoothe the corners
of San Marco into arches,
while beneath their bended
yawn
a man sits on the
geometric square marbled by
impressionist-schooled pigeons.
Their sketch chinks stone to
stone beneath his restless feet.
A velvet Dali clock droops
time upon his head,
his shoulders roof to
chimney'd brow, and
sightless eyes lost
in Mediterranean sight.
The winking sun glints
humour off the waves;
its cosmic eye on twinkled
azure blue. A sigh of
laughing, boundless
breath blows eye to tear
--the map of Venice in his face--
the spill picks path
of age-worn duct.
His Shylock smile--of mooring poles,
canal his tongue, a gondola
--laid claim his bond:
her pound of flesh, his squandered love.
He sits in sculpted pose,
to wait with mirthless age
for youth; or limping
to the Bridge of Sighs
in hope that
Casanova will return.

—Marcia Elgersma

Mcguire

I step backward so Crazy Man McGuire's words do not spit on my face.

"Are ye hearin' me boy! I'se just like you...young boy...ten years old. Just like you! So leave while ye can...get the hell out!"

McGuire's eyes are brazen blue. I look to see which one of them is the fake one. "Listen boy! I'se full of gumption...guts and marrow, and there I stood staring at them train tracks, ready to leave to Alberta, or Ontario. Them wheels was pumpin' and racin', the steam pipe was whistlin' ...I was set to board the train out of this hell!"

The Cape station is empty except for Mrs. Maybird, a lady from our church, who looks up from her knitting and frowns.

Crazy Man isn't finished, "Here people don't get nowhere, you work and die, and marry and drink...I was leaving. I was ten...like you ...and leaving." McGuire's jaw comes loose and his tongue hangs out wolf-like. "You worried about missin' your momma? Missin' her tasty pies and warm bosom? I tell ya, there be lots of warm bosoms in Ontario!"

Momma. Momma gave me ten dollars when she kissed me goodbye at her apartment door. She pointed me to the Halifax station and I ordered my ticket to Cape Breton myself.

"My momma don't live here at the Cape," I say.

Old Man McGuire's eyes say he hasn't heard me. He points one of his fingers into my chest. The nail is yellow and curved and wants cutting. A forgotten styrofoam cup, half filled with coffee, distracts the man and his thin spidery legs wander to investigate.

My stomach squelches inside as I miss Momma. She smells like flowers, and her house like dried apples. She tucks heavy blankets tight around me when I sleep, until I'm "snug as a bug in a rug," she says. She's smart too, and has taught me about justice, and the Charter of Rights and John Diefenbaker.

My hand closes around the handful of bills and change in my pocket. I step to the ticket counter and stretch my neck to peek through the rectangular opening in the window. A pin-striped man sits clipping paper clips together in a long chain.

"When is the next train to Halifax, please? I want to go back." My heart pounds chug-a-luglug, chug-a-luglug like wheels in my chest.

The man snorts and twines the chain around his fingers. "This here's the Greyhound bus station, boy. Trains don't run to Halifax anymore. Next bus in thirty minutes,"

I smooth the bills, deliberating and counting the cost.

"Edison."

My back straightens to attention. That's my father's voice. His presence penetrates every corner of the station. Mrs. Maybird adjusts her hair, the ticket man begins to fill orders. The clock ticks louder and my heart sinks, derailed.

Fluffy Carrie, my father's friend, shakes her head and giggles.

"Hello Daddy," I say. I raise my arm to shake his hand, but his eyes move down my feet; I realize with horror that my shoelace is untied. Father gives no verbal reprimand, but disapproval seeps through my skin and into my bones. I let my arm fall again at my side.

McGuire whoops and cackles. "You're pickled, boy! You're a pickle in a jar!"

Father doesn't seem to hear or see the crazed bum, but nods to my things and moves toward the door. Carrie bends down and kisses me on the cheek--she smells like powder and plastic, and I want to pinch her.

Momma says I should be nice to Carrie, even though she smokes, has feathery hats and painted nails, but Momma's never even met her.





Before leaving I look once around the waiting room. Mrs. Maybird is smiling at my father's grey overcoat back, the ticket man sits with his chin in his hand. McGuire raises left leg, right leg alternately, like teats on a milk cow. One of his eyes shines mischievously, and he points to Carrie and giggles like a woman.

Carrie smiles again her frosted smile, and to my surprise, I flip her the bird. Crazy Man McGuire's chortles and clucks ring in my ears as I follow my father's back out the door.

* * *

I lay my suitcase and knapsack at my feet, and stand unmoving in front of my father's leather-backed armchair. He pauses his smoking and looks questioningly at me. "Well, boy. You're looking fine. Welcome back home...and well, yes...put your bags in your room as you please."

And Father is finished speaking. He raises his cigar to mustached lips, closing his eyes as he draws in his cheeks. Looking closer, I notice the lines, like deep ravines, which carve up his face into puffy sections. There are double or triple lines outlining the bulbous parts of his porous nose. Deep creases shape the bridge between his eyes. I lean in to looks at the deep cleft, like the slit of a bum, which separates his chin in two. This is Father.

Anxious that his eyes might open with me still there, I slide one hand around the grip of my travel bag, and close the gaping mouth of my knapsack with the other. I see Father watching through slitted eyes as I leave the leather study.

My room isn't at all like I left it; the bed is made with a woman-white quilt cover, and there are grown-up pictures hanging, of goofy boys with red suspenders, playing baseball. And Carrie is in it.

"Come in, honey. I don't bite." Her voice oozes sweetness. She recrosses her patterned legs and pats the space beside her.

The bed sinks in the middle where Carrie and I sit; there is nowhere to look but in the dresser mirror across the way. You can't help but meet people in mirrors, and my uneasy eyes keep finding her painted ones. I do not think this is pleasant at all, but Carrie's lips spread and open into a high-pitched laugh.

"Edison, honey, you are the most serious, odd little boy I've met. Do you ever smile...or talk?"

Not odd! I peer at the boy in the mirror, my eyes, flecked with green and grey. My mousy hair sticks up in places, but only because it's curly. My mouth is small and straight. I'm not certain what she means me to reply.

"Yes, ma'am," I say. "I can talk and smile both." I take a breath of stale bedroom air, "but please, can I go outside instead?"

Carrie places a red-clawed hand on my hair and ruffles it with her fingertips, scratching my scalp slightly. "Sure, shortstuff."

She straightens her suede skirt, picks up her snakeskin purse, and leaves me alone in the mirror.

* * *

The powerful ocean wind whips my face, the smell of dulce and brine fills my nostrils and lungs. I lean into the gale, letting my arms hang loose and pull backwards by the force. My shoes go sloop-sluck, sloop-sluck in the gushy mud, and I wonder what would happen if it was chocolate. Chocolate for meals, snacks and for eternity, I think.

But the Breton chocolate trail is becoming grass and moss under my feet, and rocks push up between the foliage. Momma told me once about a mammoth creature named Seymour who dug out the ocean with his bare hands, piling up the stones on shore; that's where the rocks are from. Momma tells good stories; she would hold me on her night-gowned lap, even though I'm not so little now, and

tell all sorts of made-up stories of the sea. There was always a funny ending; Seymour got his name from his whale-of-an-eye that made him see so well, clear across the ocean!

I crawl on my knees and hands now because the smooth rocks are so steep and high that I can't walk up them. The angry ocean blasts in rhythm against the sunlit coast, spraying water all over the rocks like salty spit.

As I reach the top of my rock, I see first a frizzy grey head, with a shiny hole in the middle, then a faded blue jacket. I'm not alone here, there was a man sitting out to sea. My feet step extra quiet because I know who it is; McGuire was here. He is filling the little smooth notch in the stone which is my spot; it perfectly fits me and my sack of sandwiches which Momma always made me. From my space in the notch you can see all of the ocean and all of the sky, but still be fit inside, safe, within the rock shape. The mouths of the waves nip my shoeless toes, but no matter how they leap and twist up, the waves only fizz and spatter.

McGuire's grown-up bum hardly fits into my little nick of stone, but he joyously swings his short pant legs above the ocean lick. His mouth puckers out in a tuneless whistle, like he's singing with the wind. Crazy Man turns his head and smiles an open brown-toothed smile at my approach. I sit on my coverall knees beside him.

"Hello, Crazy Man," I say. An amused laugh comes into his right eye and he rests a gnarled palm on my slight shoulders. "Do you want to know where these rocks come from?" I ask.

He does, so I tell him about Seymour, whose gigantic arms with muscles like Samson's dug for so many years, day and night, to carve the bowl of the sea. McGuire listens attentively throughout my tale, giving only a surprised cluck every now and then, so I also tell him about Carrie, and the lipstick on her teeth, and about Father and his tight bow ties which make him angry, and I tell him about Momma and her little pretty house with no food in it, and how she got so angry and tears came when I told her I wanted, needed to stay.

McGuire listens, his ear cocked to me, and his gaze suspended between the foaming green and the crags of rock. His chicken cackle lessens and his busy eyebrows gather. He reaches out his yellow-nailed finger, and gingerly wipes the slaty spit off my face and eyes. And Crazy Man draws from his tattered coat a present.

At first I do not know what McGuire is giving me. It's a square wooden piece, with four rough notches etched in the top corners. The center of the wood block has a small shaft reaching all the way to the bottom. I take the gift in my hands, and wrap my fingers around the carved top, unsure of what it's meant to be.

McGuire places a rough hand under my armpit and lifts me to my feet. He raises my gift to his mouth, and facing into the mighty wind, the ocean, the expanse of the sky, McGuire blows and blows. The whistle sounds four clashing pitches at once and bellows, over miles of air, the sound of the train.

My friend lowers the train whistle and looks at me with exultant face, listening to the silence that follows. A look of joy is on his face that is not crazy at all, and my breath catches in my lungs as I gaze.

Crazy Man again places the whistle in my small palm, and wrapping his mighty hand around the back of my head, draws me to him with a force that presses the whistle into my gut and makes me cry out. McGuire releases me and is gone, and I am left again alone with the ocean, the whistle and me.

—Karen Brink





Leftovers

Take
this mess
from my plate.
Give me a feast fit
for a queen:
fluffy pillows
of mashed potatoes
erupting with a lavish
warm blanket of gravy,
covering sweet baby carrots.
Give me
well-scrubbed
cauliflower that
rests
in a steamy
bath
of bubbling sauce, lying
next to tender meat
coated
with fresh-smelling spices.

Take this mess from my plate:
Give me the lot I deserve, i need.
“Have a nice day,” you say,
taking my last ticket and
rationing out another mess
to another Raggedy Ann like me.

I think of how tonight you will
go to your plush suite in the sky,
a castle fit for a queen, and pick
at a feast with a silver
spoon, wrinkling your nose in
disgust, throwing it in the trash
to be eaten by dogs.

And I--will wrap my rags around me,
relishing greasy tatters and
licking your bones.

—Julia Dam

Night Class

a neverending game of
intellectual dodge-ball
under guns
and thumbs
makes me tired
and wired
I just don't know what
you want
and I'm sure not gonna
give it to you,
and no! I don't find it
fascinating
so don't look at me for
answers.
I'm not a
stute
and you're not con
cise
I'm just a backwoods
rube
who wants to throw a
bric
for two hours
and
a
half.

—Andrea VanderKooij

Tired of...

I have two fingers,
one in each ear;
with my teeth I grab
a glass of whisky,
tip my head back and swallow;
elbows raised,
fingers still in place;
my arms are chicken wings.
You're talking,
I know,
but I can't hear you
and soon I'll be asleep.

—Kai Groen





Danse Macabre

Black trees like
charred skeletons dance--
burnt marionettes
in a sinister wind that
whistles with haunting timbre
an ominous tune.
In the twilight
of black November
they wave grotesquely,
swaying trance-like,
silhouettes against a
foreboding sky smeared
with charcoal clouds.
The candle in my window
flickers; I watch, again
alone. Not a simple whisper
in my ear; it is the limbs
that rattle, clacking;
bony digits reach: hungry
sticks of skinny beggars.
Death sticks to blades
of grass like clinging
grasshoppers, seeps under
windows and oozes along walls;
thief-like clouds creep and
slither to smother the unsuspecting moon.

—Stephanie Cilia

Elegy

They live in oak coffins
with fake gold trim:
places, people circumstances.
Never a day passes
that they don't knock on my door, but
I am no necromancer;
I can't bring them back from
death, from
memory
to
physicality.

I can see them waving from the shore
as I sail, looking back,
on a ship of thoughtful fools.

—Kai Groen

Two People in a Place

Mindi enters the ballroom at Mitch's side. Actually, she walks a step behind him. She wears a long and shapeless black dress with long sleeves. Mitch wears his tailored tuxedo that so immaculately accentuates his broad shoulders and his curved, carved buttocks. His bow-tie is crisp.

"These lights are so bright," says Mindi.

"But don't they make you feel so alive!" breathes Mitch.

As they move further into the glittering room, Mitch quickens his pace, craning his neck and darting his head in every direction to find all the people he knows. A beautiful bird. Mindi lags behind and focuses her stare directly ahead on Mitch's back. She swallows frequently.

"Oh Min," says Mitch as he flies further away, "I just saw Douglas and Baylor and, well, a whole slew of other fellows that I need to touch base with. Do you mind?"

He says more, but his head is turned away from Mindi towards the sparkling people and his words fade as he breezes into the waves of crowd. Mindi retreats and promptly bumps into a shiny lady.

"Oh, I'm terribly sorry," says Mindi. "I'm awfully clumsy. Are you all right? I'm terribly sorry."

The lady nods once in haughty annoyance and turns her back. Mindi steps forward but then steps backward and then turns around, unsure of where she should go. She spots a table bearing an enormous punch bowl, and she steps carefully towards it, focusing her gaze directly ahead on the crystal bowl. She is very conscious of the sound of her own footsteps. At the table, she picks up a glass of glistening punch. Her hand trembles as she raises the glass to her unpainted lips.

An outburst of laughter seizes her attention away from the punch bowl. She turns and notices a group of happy people who appear to dominate the activity of the ballroom. The attention of the group is converged on Mitch.

"And so Leno said, 'Where did you learn to make your line of questioning so unanswerable?' And then I said, 'The truth is, Jay, I took lessons from both Benjamin Matlock and Perry Mason.'"

Uproarious laughter. Mindi looks on from behind her punch glass.

"The trick with Jay Leno is, you give him sugar. That's what he wants, even if he knows you're deeper than the icing."

Fierce nods of acknowledgement. Mitch grins and the lights reflect on his teeth. He turns his head to discreetly itch his neck and in doing so, catches a glimpse of Mindi standing by the punch bowl. Craning his neck and raising his arm above the crowd, he beckons obviously to her. A beautiful bird in the shine-reflecting water, in control. His attention then steers immediately back to the happy group, and the convergence of glittering attentions is on him again. Mindi weaves awkwardly through the sequins and sparkles to follow Mitch's summons. At last she finds his back.

"This is my wife," says Mitch, pulling her towards his side. "Min, this is everyone."

Mindi stares directly ahead at the sleeve of Mitch's tuxedo, which is still before her. Mitch still shines upon the faces of the group and his mouth opens to say something more.

"What do you do? Min was it?" asks a female voice from the crowd. Mitch closes his mouth abruptly. Mindi averts her head as though waking from a deep sleep and dream. The voice is speaking to her.

"What do I do? Do you mean for a living?"

"Well, anything actually," the voice laughs.

Mindi stares into nowhere and a long, dead silence falls over the crowd. The bright lights make her look wan. She swallows. And swallows again. "I don't really know. I don't do anything, especially. Nothing in particular. Nothing of importance."

—Jane Hogeterp





INVISIBLE

Sometimes, as I sit alone,
I wonder...
Am I here at all?
I laugh,
no one smiles.
I cry,
no one weeps.
All around me,
people gather happily,
life is great,
but not for me.
I sit alone,
wishing...
perhaps foolishly,
for someone to care,
to fall in love with ME.
I bear no hatred,
I love those who are lucky.
I just wish...
I wish they loved me too.
The Bible and its teachers,
they all reply,
Jesus is enough, I need no other friend.
It may be true,
but not for me.
I need someone here,
someone on earth.
Someone strong and wise.
I need to touch,
that friend...
before my eyes.

—Kathleen Jarvis

Salt Water Wells, Stale Loaves

I go to the well
And look to the bottom
I see all the pebbles
I see the grasses
And decaying leaves
The water is foul
Full of tobacco
Full of salt

I go to the well
And look to the bottom
I see all the clothes
The bras
The panties
The water is beautiful
Full of sex
Full of salt

I go to the well
And look to the bottom
I see the sheets of music
And the notes of anger
I hear the water
Moving swiftly
Full of hate
Full of salt

I go to the well
And look to the bottom
But I don't find it
Water so deep
Water so cold
Water pure
And good
Full of life
Full

But I walk
From the well
Drinking from the salt
From well to well
I go
Eating stale loaves
To keep me going
In circles

—Neil Houtman

When I Was a Lamb

“Did you know sheep have tails?”
I kick my rubber boots against feedbin below,
shake my head “no”; I follow
the Bunyan hand as it reaches for redhot vice.





His oily fist clenches four hoofed legs.
Upended between coverall thighs
the lamb is still; glassy eyes blink, bemused.
Searing clamp closes around matted wool.

Acrid smoke of burning flesh
enters my nostrils and chokes.
Like fetid, wet firelogs, a sizzle,
a dull thud, through serried bone.

Then the shortened lamb is righted
and with wriggly behind skitters to friends.
Mr. Coe glances up; I gulp at his words,
“Who cut off your tail, boy?”

—Karen Brink

Brotherly Love

My vision has turned red
Blood red it seems
I attempt to dry
my face
but my kleenex dissolves
in all the blood
I am not bleeding
for I feel no pain at all
some joy maybe
I don't know why I'm smiling
just am
Usually a lifeless body
in front of me would be horror
especially
ones whose wrists have been slit
still pumping I notice
I shrug
put down the knife
wash my hands
and go upstairs

—Caleb deboer

Lost in the Valley

I thought only guys
were afraid to look at maps.

I haven't taken mine out in
a really long time now,
and I'm thoroughly lost,
I'm sure.

But I'm also sure
that when I give in
and give up
and unfold the map again--
it will tell me exactly
how to get home.

—Jeannette Sandink

Buried Thoughts

An image stirs up memories,
Fragments of the past
Rise to the surface
A puzzle of pieces
That don't quite fit.
Reality blurs,
Details fade.
Thoughts teeter on the edge
A tiny shove,
A slight distraction,
And it's lost.
Slipping through the fingers of the mind,
Falling into the pit of subconscious.

—Caroline Kralt





Sins of Omission

A gold mine,
undiscovered
by the one
to whom it belongs.

The riches unused,
wealth under cover
under rock
hard as flesh;

A crime equal to theft.

(yet it is simple to hide
sins of omission)

—Jeannette Sandink

Satellite on the Schoolyard

Playground, soccer field, set of swings
and jungle gym -- see in them
the swarming, spinning orbitings
(the atonal music of the spheres)
of children spread across their course.

Uncharted corner of the space,
a sodden patch of grass where fences
meet, chainlink clawing weeds
and dirt -- see in that
the drifting motion of a boy.

He is who I was, light years ago,
a world a sun away.
When a larger body, brawling in sun-baked,
dirt-caked jeans and musclebound shirt
would near my atmosphere, I would rise

with a tremor in my core, pulled closer
by reputation's gravity.
Our eyes would meet like poles opposed --
north and south -- and, pull and push,
I fled repulsed through hollow holes of dark

where no voice called, no light enthralled,
no movement passed my desert path.
I once approached the glowing blaze
of a stardust girl, only to be met by
her nebulous laughter, a supernova of contempt,

leaving me to fly again, among
the glaring clustered bodies, my blushing
fiery face burned and scorned, my body
withered in its soot, streaking like a comet
with its tail between its legs.

He is who I am and he is not. A glow
exudes, his atmosphere is warm
and breathable. A dimpled crescent beams
in the contours of his globe. He brushes
the dirt from his knees and mounts the swing again.

I recall rough weather. Typhoon, cyclone,
the seasons of my skies were all monsoon
and water doused the glowing. Toxins
bobbed about my air, creatures suffered there,
and bitter winters blighted flora's growth.

I watch his revolutions, his rings
of smiling round and round the trees,
round the battered athletes' scuffed up knees,
a light beneath his bruises. I recall
lying there, lowering my head

into the coming laughter, and wonder.
Which secret mines yield such ore
of gleaming underneath? Does the core
bubble, does some star stare at him with love,
or is this all a trick of light and shade?

He is who I was, but he will never follow
my vacant trails across this sky.
When I observe a huddled gang
of children, hear their bright tones of joy,
squeals, shrieks, their crashing accusations --

when I walk the streets at lunchtime,
downtown, look in storefronts, or talk
to haggling bums at busstops --
when I phone a friend, share a taxi
with a stranger, when I see a crowd --





I merely see a galaxy of single orbits unrelated, tracing paths across the sky, across the street, across the city toward inconclusive ends, in circles around the same dying sun.

We are all one another's Plutos, tiny chunks of rock and ice so cold and far away that to him my sun appears no brighter, no warmer, than a match just past arm's length, unreachable.

On the schoolyard our hellos are pindrops on a planet's surface a billion miles away, our study groups are stars colliding, parties are the mass inhaled into a gaping black hole.

At a desk alone, a book before me, enveloped in an atmosphere of heat and light which calmly shields me from the nebulae and solar winds beyond the clouds, I'm a healthy planet.

Thus I watch this image of myself, my twin world, the world I once was, bounding on the playground. Separated by a universe of matter, each unreachable to the other, we are close as any two.

—David Lehr

Song

Blackness falls, tension builds,
hush sweeps across the room.
All is silent,
focussed, anticipating.
Light streams on a lone figure,
her eyes closed, body swaying,
while soft melodies whisper
and encircle wholly.
Lips part, breath swells
and the soul overwhelms
and bursts...
into song.

—Julia Dam

Outsider

Montage of withered bent skeleton frames
draped in striped dirty faded cloths
which seem to hold up the starved bodies.
Grime clogs up every last suffocating pore,
parched lips pursed tight, laughterless.
The man in back glances outside sight,
smugly bears his clean shaven creamy pus.
Under his rags this man is an outcast.
White shirt and pristine Oxford tie.
He is so unfamiliar the others can't see him.
Sunken dark sockets surround dry eyes
that look through their world of hate.
They stand like cattle waiting for slaughter,
waiting to be ordered or beaten senseless.

—Caleb deBoer

Sour Grapes

When I spoke to Annie last
my head went numb--
that is what happens,
(I think)
when years of faith
melt
like
wax without wicks,
a stench heavy, thick
like incense, nothing left but
ashes at my feet and
on my forehead,
gritty on my shaking fingers.
Take of this body, drink
Christ with a cork, she said;
How can you believe it's Him
When all you taste is sour grapes?

—Stephanie Cilia



